



City of Seattle

Department of Planning and Development  
D. M. Sugimura, Director

**CITY OF SEATTLE  
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Applicant Name: Cheryl Sizov for Department of Planning and Development

Address of Proposal: City-wide Application except Downtown

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION**

The proposal is a legislative action to amend Chapter 23.41 of the Seattle Municipal Code, to replace the design guidelines used in the Design Review Program entitled “Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings” (October 1993, November 1998) with updated design guidelines entitled “Seattle Design Guidelines,” and to make revisions to 19 sets of Neighborhood Design Guidelines in order to be consistent with the updated Seattle Design Guidelines in organization and layout

The following approval is required:

**SEPA - Environmental Determination** - Chapter 25.05, Seattle Municipal Code.

**SEPA DETERMINATION:** ☐ Exempt ☒ DNS ☐ MDNS ☐ EIS

**Proposal**

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is recommending that amendments to SMC Chapter 23.41 be undertaken to adopt changes to the original 1993 Seattle Design Guidelines that are applied through the Design Review Program to multi-family and commercial development of a size that meets the thresholds for participation in the Design Review process. The proposal includes 11 individual design guidelines, each accompanied by a list of approaches and strategies for meeting the guideline, and photos and/or graphics as examples. The guidelines will be used as the primary guiding document for the Design Review Program, and serve the purpose of clearly explaining the City’s expectations with regard to the quality of architecture, open space design, and the public realm built by private development. In addition, 19 sets of neighborhood-specific design guidelines have been reformatted to coordinate with the updated citywide guidelines, and will also be put forward for adoption by City Council.

## **Public Comments**

The development of updated Seattle Design Guidelines and reformatted Neighborhood Design Guidelines reflects a lengthy community effort to build support for design guidelines that are effective, useable, and clear, incorporating lessons learned from administration of the existing design review program and the adoption of neighborhood specific guidelines, and incorporating current best practices in design guidelines and address issues not contemplated during the drafting of the original design guidelines in 1993. The project team met with key constituencies in the community at several points during the analysis and development phases of the project. The comments received were instrumental in the development of the final draft design guidelines. In addition, the project team met regularly with an internal Core Team consisting of DPD Planning and Design Review managers for direction and advice through the course of the project.

Proposed changes to the Land Use Code require City Council approval. Public comment will be taken on the proposed amendments during future Council public hearings.

**What is Design Review?** The design review process, as provided for in the Land Use Code Chapter 23.41, is intended to be a forum for community members, developers, architects, and city staff, aided by citizen design review boards, to identify design-related concerns early in the design development of a project to ensure that new development makes positive contributions to Seattle's neighborhoods. Design Review is a component of a Master Use Permit (MUP) application and is required for new commercial, multi-family and mixed-use developments that exceed specific thresholds for design review set forth in the Land Use Code, and located in specific zones. The design review process provides flexibility in the application of development standards through the granting of "design departures." Departures are granted when it is demonstrated that the modification of a prescriptive Code standard would result in a better overall building design through an improved response to unique site conditions or the compelling character of the surrounding area.

**Design Guidelines.** The Seattle Design Guidelines apply citywide (except for Downtown) to all proposed new development subject to design review. These design review guidelines for multifamily and commercial buildings are a compilation of broad urban design principles intended to address such aspects of development as site planning, height, bulk and scale relationships, architectural elements, landscaping, and the pedestrian environment. Zoning rules and prescriptive standards are intended to establish the primary use, intensity and scale of development in a specific zone. Design guidelines and the design review process help to ensure through application of applicable design guidelines and flexibility in requirements that new development responds appropriately to the context of its surroundings.

As part of a citywide neighborhood planning process, many neighborhoods expressed an interest in augmenting the citywide Design Review Guidelines. Neighborhood design guidelines are intended to reveal the unique character of a given neighborhood, to call one's attention to the specific goals for neighborhood development, the key locations for important design considerations, and thereby protect, to the extent feasible, the qualities and values that a specific neighborhood shares in the face of change. Where the City Council has adopted neighborhood design guidelines (i.e. University Community, Roosevelt, Pike-Pine, Ballard Municipal Center area, West Seattle Junction, Admiral and Green Lake, Northgate, South Lake Union, Wallingford, and North District/Lake City), new development must respond to both the *neighborhood* and the applicable *Seattle Design Guidelines*.

## **ANALYSIS - SEPA**

The initial disclosure of the potential impacts from this proposal was made in an environmental checklist prepared by DPD. The information in this checklist, review of the proposed text changes and the proposed design guidelines, and the experience of the lead agency with review of similar projects, form the basis for this analysis and decision.

### **Short-term Impacts**

As a non-project action, the proposed amendment will not have any short-term impact on the environment. Future development affected by this legislation will be reviewed under existing laws and substantial development projects will be subject to SEPA to address short-term impacts on the environment.

### **Long-term Impacts**

Zoning in the commercial, multifamily, Seattle Mixed, and Industrial Commercial zones throughout the City establishes the rules that govern how much development can occur. Zoning defines the overall height, bulk and scale of development and the density of development whether office, retail or residential. Parking amounts, location, and access are set under zoning, as well. Design Guidelines refine a building that might otherwise meet zoning standards and address, for instance, how the design of the building may influence the perception of the scale of the building or might suggest ways that a building improve its orientation to the street and the pedestrian who may be most affected by the scale of new development. The Design Guidelines may also recognize the character of a neighborhood and ensure that a new building's architecture or expression through materials, architectural features, or siting enhances the character of its surrounding, rather than imposing itself upon the surrounding area. Therefore, no significant adverse, long-term impacts are anticipated. Although no long-term impacts are anticipated, further discussion of various elements of the environment is warranted.

The affected areas of the City are primarily those zoned multifamily, neighborhood commercial, and commercial and designated for multifamily or commercial development under the City's Comprehensive Plan. No incompatible uses would be allowed or encouraged by the proposal. The design guidelines would be used to ensure that new development is sensitive to existing neighborhood context and reinforce the positive urban form and architectural attributes of the area, which is consistent with existing plans.

The proposed guidelines are not anticipated to result in adverse impacts on any element of the environment. The guidelines reflect the objectives of neighborhood plans and the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan in encouraging and supporting mixed-use urban environments in which housing, commercial uses and essential neighborhood goods and services are located in close proximity to promote walking, bicycling and transit use. The guidelines encourage the pedestrian environment to be of high design quality, safe, accessible, and interactive. On the whole, this type of environment should encourage greater substitution of pedestrian trips for automobile trips, helping to limit transportation impacts of future development.

The proposed design guidelines, through provisions for an enhanced pedestrian environment, appropriately designed streetscape, and focus on the architectural expression and character of new development will have the affect of reducing impacts on neighborhoods and promoting compatibility of new development with existing development where the neighborhood context is a positive expression of the neighborhood's vision. Where the existing context is inconsistent with the future vision of a neighborhood and with the City's Comprehensive Plan, the proposed guidelines will aid in the positive evolution of each neighborhood as new development is proposed.

Further, individual projects that may utilize the provisions of this proposal will be subject to environmental review (if they meet or exceed thresholds for environmental review) and environmentally critical areas regulations as they move forward.

### **DECISION - SEPA**

The decision was made after review by the responsible official on behalf of the lead agency or a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and form. The intent of this determination is to satisfy the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21C), including the requirement to inform the public agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

- ☒ Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030 2c.
- ☐ Determination of Significance; this proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030 2c.

Signature: (signature on file)  
William K. Mills, Senior Land Use Planner  
Department of Planning and Development

Date: April 25, 2011